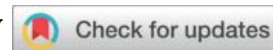


The Role of Activists from the Oued Souf Region in Arming the Liberation Revolution (1947–1962): A Case Study



Dr. Elhabib Salem

University of Martyr Hamma Lakhdar, El Oued, Algeria
salemelhabib95@gmail.com
ee.salem@univ-blida2.dz

Dr. Ayoub Chargui

University of Martyr Hamma Lakhdar, El Oued, Algeria
ayoubchargui0@gmail.com
ea.chergui@univ-blida2.dz

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Abstract:

Mohamed Belhaj Mihi was influenced by the liberationist thought that prevailed in Algeria during the early twentieth century. This thought aimed to confront French colonialism and preserve the cultural and national identity of the Algerian people. Mihi was particularly influenced by the reformist movement led by scholars such as Abdelhamid Ben Badis, which focused on restoring national awareness and educating new generations on authentic national, linguistic, and cultural values.

This influence played a major role in shaping his political and militant awareness, pushing him to engage in national activities and resistance against French colonialism.

Before the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution in 1954, Belhaj Mihi began participating in anti-colonial national activities and was among the mujahideen who contributed to organizing armed and clandestine operations.

From this, we raise the following question: Who is Mohamed Belhaj Mihi? And how did he contribute to collecting and transporting weapons to Algeria?

Introduction:

Despite the nature of French military rule in Oued Souf during the colonial period (1881–1962), the region was not isolated from the developments of the national cause and the events of the national movement. The area witnessed the establishment of branches of national parties and organizations, most notably the Algerian People's Party (PPA), whose branch appeared in El Oued in 1943, followed by the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) in 1946.

When the Special Organization (OS) was founded in Algiers in 1947, a cell was also established in El Oued. Among the prominent activists in these movements in Oued Souf was Mohamed

Belhaj Mihi, who was especially active within the Special Organization (OS), particularly in the matter of bringing weapons from Tunisia and Libya in preparation for the outbreak of the blessed liberation revolution.

Thus, who is Mohamed Belhaj Mihi? And how did he contribute to bringing weapons convoys into Algeria in preparation for the revolution?

1. Birth and Upbringing of Mohamed Belhaj Mihi (1919–1962):

Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, whose full name was Bachir Mihi ibn Abdelkader ibn Nasser, was born to Jomaa Bougazala in 1919 in El Oued, Algeria. He became known by three names: Hamma Belhaj, Bachir Mihi, and Mohamed Belhaj, the latter being the most widely used. This name was given to him by his four sisters—Lalahom, Bachira, Fatima, and Aicha—who preferred to call him *Mohamed* in honor of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him). The surname Belhaj was derived from his father, El Hadj Abdelkader Mihi, and he became widely known as Mohamed Belhaj.

Mohamed Belhaj belonged to a well-known agricultural family from the Ouled Ahmed district of El Oued. His family traces its lineage to the Al-Amihat clan, one of the seven clans of the Ouled Ahmed tribe. According to one tradition, the tribe derives its name from Ahmed ibn Habib ibn Bahna ibn Salim ibn Mansour ibn Ikrimah ibn Khasfa ibn Qais ibn Aylan. Another tradition attributes the name to a man called Hammad ibn Omar ibn Hanzala Al-Qurashi, who is said to have fled to Kairouan after killing his cousin. However, reputable historians have rejected this latter account as historically inaccurate.

The Ouled Ahmed tribe consists of seven clans: Soufia, Ouled Mayassa, Ouled Jaballah, Al-Amihat, Al-Awashir, Al-Sawamish, and Ouled Ayyad. (1)

Mohamed Belhaj grew up in a relatively prosperous family compared with most families in Oued Souf at the time. His family's wealth came from its ownership of extensive palm groves, as his father possessed an entire date-palm oasis, which represented considerable wealth during that period. He memorized portions of the Holy Qur'an before his father enrolled him in the Arabic school of Sheikh Abdelaziz Cherif.

From an early age, Mohamed Belhaj developed a deep hatred of French colonialism. His resentment intensified after the French authorities executed his three paternal uncles—Ali, Salem, and Abdelrahman—in Lambèse Prison. He greatly admired the Association of Algerian Muslim Ulema and participated in the demonstrations organized during the Association's visit to Oued Souf in 1937. He was also among the young men who participated in the 1938 uprising led by Sheikh Abdelaziz Cherif, commonly known as the Second Amich Revolt. During the uprising, the insurgents killed several French soldiers and set fire to a number of colonial government facilities. In retaliation, the colonial authorities arrested many local inhabitants, including several leaders of the Qadiriyya Sufi order. They were imprisoned in Koudiat Prison in Constantine, where they endured brutal torture, and several prisoners died as a result.

Mohamed Belhaj was among the founders of the first cell of the Algerian People's Party (PPA) in Oued Souf. Together with Abdelkader El Amoudi, Ahmed Miloudi, Mouldi Ounissi, Chefaï Gueddara, and Bachir Ben Moussa, he established the party's first organizational nucleus in the region.

In 1947, Mohamed Belouizdad entrusted him with the mission of collecting weapons and establishing communication with the Biskra region, whose organizational leader was Larbi Ben M'hidi. When Abdelhamid Mehri, Ahmed Bouda, and Messaoud Boukadoum visited Oued Souf during the electoral campaign for the 1948 Algerian Assembly elections, they encouraged local youth to join the nationalist movement, resulting in a significant increase in membership. Ahmed Miloudi represented the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) in the elections held in Oued Souf, while Mohamed Belhaj participated in the movement's Belcourt meeting in 1948. (2)

That same year, Larbi Ben M'hidi contacted Mohamed Belhaj and assigned him the task of procuring weapons from Tripoli and transporting them by camel caravans to the Aurès Mountains. Belhaj had already established a reputation as an experienced arms trafficker, having engaged in such activities before the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution. He successfully transported a caravan of five camels loaded with weapons, which were first concealed in the home of Bachir Jaballah in Reguiba and later in the house of Belkacem Addouka in El Oued before being transferred to the Aurès.

This operation continued successfully, and numerous shipments of weapons were delivered to Arris through Zeribet Hamad. These operations were planned and coordinated by Mohamed Belhaj in collaboration with Abdelkader El Amoudi and Bachir Ben Moussa.

Meanwhile, Abdelkader El Amoudi and Bachir Ghendir purchased weapons from dealers in Tripoli and Tunisia, transporting them to Biskra, from where they were forwarded to the Aurès. Notably, the first shipment of weapons to reach the Aurès was organized by Mohamed Belhaj in 1948. After traveling to Libya through Tunisia, he purchased a quantity of surplus weapons left over from the Second World War, assisted by a Libyan associate named Al-Koni Al-Shin. The mission lasted approximately three months.

On his return journey, Belhaj was accompanied by an experienced desert guide and led a caravan of seven camels carrying weapons and ammunition. The shipment was transported to Zeribet Hamad, near Biskra, and hidden in several ghouts (traditional sunken palm groves) east of El Oued.

Subsequently, Mohamed Belhaj and Abdelkader El Amoudi altered their smuggling methods. Instead of using camel caravans, weapons were concealed within truckloads of dates heading toward Biskra. This change became necessary after the French colonial authorities intensified surveillance of the caravan routes through informants and professional desert trackers (*jarrah*), leading to the arrest of Bachir Ghendir in April 1951 (3).

Mohamed Belhaj was also among the founders of the Fouh El-Rimal branch of the Algerian Muslim Scouts in El Oued. He supervised the training of young people and worked to instill patriotic values in them.

In September 1954, he was arrested on charges of weapons smuggling. Although released in early January 1955, he was placed under house arrest. He later escaped after obtaining a passport through the intervention of Sheikh Taliba Abdelkader, chief of the Ouled Ahmed tribe, and subsequently traveled to Tunisia.

Upon arriving in Tunisia, Mohamed Belhaj joined the General Secretariat of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Saïd Abdelhay assigned him responsibility for coordinating between the General Secretariat and the command of Taleb Larbi, as well as overseeing the procurement of weapons and supplies.

In 1956, Saïd Abdelhay sent him to Egypt to attend a party conference. During his visit, he was personally received by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who presented him with five Egyptian military uniforms as a gesture of appreciation.

In 1957, Mohamed Belhaj was arrested in Tunisia while carrying a quantity of weapons and remained imprisoned until 1961. After the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), he was appointed by decree as Chief of Police of the Oasis Province.

Mohamed Belhaj was assassinated under mysterious circumstances near Touggourt on the night of 21 August 1962, and the exact location of his death remains unknown. His contribution to the Algerian Revolution was acknowledged even by his adversaries. In 1958, the French Minister of the Interior reportedly declared that 45% of the weapons used by the Algerian Revolution had been transported by Mohamed Belhaj through the Oued Souf region. His fellow martyrs, Bachir Chihani and Abbas Laghrour, likewise testified to his decisive role in securing the large quantities of weapons that made the outbreak and continuation of the Algerian War of Independence possible. (4)

It is worth noting that the weapons procurement operations were divided into two routes: one through Tunisia and the other through Libya. In total, four major missions were carried out.

2. Mohamed Belhaj's Role in Collecting and Smuggling Weapons

Mohamed Belhaj was among the founders of the first cell of the Algerian People's Party (PPA) in Oued Souf. Together with Abdelkader El Amoudi, Ahmed Miloudi, Mouldi Ounissi, Chafii Gueddara, and Bachir Ben Moussa, he laid the foundations of the party in the region. In 1947, he was entrusted by Mohamed Belouizdad with the mission of collecting weapons and establishing contacts with the Biskra region, where Larbi Ben M'hidi was responsible for the organization.

When Abdelhamid Mehri, Ahmed Bouda, and Messaoud Boukadoum visited Oued Souf during the campaign for the 1948 Algerian Assembly elections, they encouraged local youth to join the nationalist movement, resulting in a significant increase in membership. Ahmed Miloudi was appointed to represent the Movement for the Triumph of Democratic Liberties (MTLD) in the

elections in Souf. Mohamed Belhaj also participated in the Belcourt meeting of the movement in 1948.

During the same year, Larbi Ben M'hidi contacted Mohamed Belhaj and assigned him the task of bringing weapons from Tripoli and transporting them by caravan to the Aurès Mountains. Belhaj had already gained a reputation as a skilled arms trader, having undertaken similar operations before the outbreak of the Revolution. He successfully transported a caravan consisting of five camels loaded with weapons, which were temporarily concealed in the house of Bachir Jaballah in Reguiba and later in the house of Belkacem Addouka in El Oued before being transferred to the Aurès.

This operation continued successfully, with numerous consignments of weapons being delivered to Arris through Zeribet Hamad. These operations were carefully planned by Mohamed Belhaj in collaboration with Abdelkader El Amoudi and Bachir Ben Moussa.

Likewise, Abdelkader El Amoudi and Bachir Ghendir purchased weapons from dealers in Tripoli and Tunisia, transporting them to Biskra before forwarding them to the Aurès. It is worth noting that the first shipment of weapons to reach the Aurès was organized by Mohamed Belhaj in 1948. He traveled to Libya through Tunisia, where he purchased a large quantity of surplus weapons left over from the Second World War. He was assisted in this mission by a Libyan man named Al-Koni Al-Shin. The journey lasted approximately three months.

Upon his return, Belhaj hired an experienced desert guide and brought back seven camels loaded with weapons and ammunition. The shipment was transported by camel to Zeribet Hamad near Biskra and hidden in several *ghouts* (traditional sunken palm groves) east of El Oued.

Subsequently, Mohamed Belhaj and Abdelkader El Amoudi changed their smuggling strategy. Instead of relying on camel caravans, weapons were concealed inside truckloads of dates destined for Biskra. This adjustment became necessary after the colonial authorities intensified surveillance of caravans through informants and professional trackers (*Jarrah*), leading to the arrest of Bachir Ghendir in April 1951.

Mohamed Belhaj was also one of the founders of the **Fouh El-Rimal** branch of the Muslim Scouts in El Oued, where he supervised the training of young men and instilled patriotic values in them.

In September 1954, he was arrested on charges of arms smuggling. Although he was released in early January 1955, he remained under house arrest. He later escaped after obtaining a passport through the intervention of Sheikh Taliba Abdelkader, the chief of the Ouled Ahmed tribe, and subsequently traveled to Tunisia.

In Tunisia, Mohamed Belhaj joined the General Secretariat of the National Liberation Front (FLN). Saïd Abdelhay assigned him the responsibility of coordinating between the General Secretariat and the command of Taleb Larbi, while overseeing the procurement of weapons and supplies.

In 1956, Saïd Abdelhay sent him to Egypt to attend a party conference. During his visit, he was personally received by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, who presented him with five Egyptian military uniforms as a gift.

In 1957, Belhaj was arrested in Tunisia while carrying a quantity of weapons and remained imprisoned until 1961. Following the establishment of the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA), he was appointed by decree as Chief of Police for the Oasis Province.

Mohamed Belhaj was assassinated under mysterious circumstances near Touggourt on the night of **21 August 1962**, and his body was never recovered. His importance was acknowledged even by his adversaries. In 1958, the French Minister of the Interior reportedly stated that **45% of the weapons used by the Algerian Revolution had been transported by Mohamed Belhaj through the Oued Souf region**. His fellow martyrs, Bachir Chihani and Abbas Laghrour, also testified to his pivotal role in securing large quantities of weapons that contributed significantly to the success of the Algerian Revolution.

It is worth noting that the weapons procurement missions were divided into two routes: one originating from Tunisia and the other from Libya. In total, four major missions were undertaken.

3. Belhaj's Arms Procurement Missions from Libya and Tunisia

First Mission

The first mission took place in **1948** with a budget of **8,400 French francs**. It lasted **three months and four days** and was supervised by Zouari Ahmed Essadek together with Mohamed Belhaj Mihi. The caravan consisted of **three camels** carrying:

- 100 Italian Sten submachine guns obtained from the Derg region in Libya.
- 300 rounds of ammunition.

Second Mission

The second mission was also conducted in 1948, with a budget of 300,000 French francs. It lasted approximately two and a half months under the supervision of Mohamed Belhaj Mihi.

The shipment originated from Ksar Ben Akhdakh in Tunisia and consisted of **three camels** carrying:

- 150 firearms, including 80 Italian Sten submachine guns.
- 30 pistols.
- 2 German-made machine guns.

- 10 American-made automatic rifles.
- 10 Type-86 rifles.
- 18 four-barrel firearms together **with 3,000 Italian- and French-made cartridges (5).**

Third Mission

The third **mission took place in 1949, with an allocated budget of 500,000 French francs. It consisted of six camels** carrying:

- 200 assorted firearms.
- 30 pistols.
- 1,000 knives.
- 5,000 rounds of ammunition of various types.

Fourth Mission

The fourth mission was conducted in 1951, with a budget of 400,000 French francs. Mohamed Belhaj led the mission together with several activists, including Ouadah Ali, Zouari Ahmed Essadek, Tamma Ali, and his brother Tayeb.

The expedition departed from the Mrazig region of Tunisia and transported the following cargo:

- 50 Italian-made rifles.
- 20 Italian-made 7.5 mm firearms.
- 2,000 rounds of ammunition. (6)

These missions began in February 1947. During this period, Mohamed Belhaj made several journeys across the Algerian and Tunisian deserts to Libya. Each expedition lasted approximately two months. On some occasions, he traveled with the experienced desert guide Dhaif Allah Mustapha Al-Qattawi, heading toward the Sinawin region, northeast of Ghadames.

On other missions, he was accompanied by Ahmed Essadek Zouari, Mohamed Beltrache Tamma, and Bachir Ben Nasser Bougazala. Their destinations included Tripoli, Yefren, Al-Rajban, Zintan, Fassato, Jabal Al-Hawamid, Al-Ruhaybat, and Nalut, where the Ouled Mahmoud tribe resided. They also maintained contact with Sheikh Al-Aissaoui Al-Mahmoudi in southern Libya, as well as Tahar Al-Bousiri and his cousin Abdallah. These operations continued from mid-1948 until the second half of 1953, during which large quantities of rifles, ammunition, and optical field glasses for target observation and range estimation were acquired. (7)

As the principal organizer of these arms procurement missions, Mohamed Belhaj also relied on the assistance of a Libyan associate known as Al-Koni Al-Shin, who played an important role in

facilitating the transportation of weapons and ammunition. Shipments originating from Ghadames crossed directly into Algerian territory before proceeding to Oued Souf, while those departing from the collection centers at Nalut or Sinawin crossed the southern Tunisian desert before entering Algeria.

Initially, Mohamed Belhaj traveled by truck from El Oued to the border town of Douz in Tunisia. Most of the procurement missions departed from southern Tunisian towns, particularly Douz, the Mrazig region, the Beni Khédache Mountains, Hamma Beni Zid, Nekab, Houaya, Medenine, and Ben Gardane.

He was assisted by several volunteers from these regions, including Lakhdar Chaabane, Mohamed Debchi Chetioui, Ali Moussa Chetioui, Mustapha Belhaj, Mustapha Ben Ibrahim from the Mrazig tribe, Wanas Essadek Ben Ammar from Hamma Beni Zid, Ali Ben Mahdem from Mazouna, Ahmed Ben Sharafeddine Laghribi, Ahmed Ben Ammara from Akkara, Kilani from the Shawamekh tribe in Nekab, and Ali Al-Medenini.

The typical cargo consisted of various types of pistols, nine-shot and four-shot rifles, British Sten submachine guns, Russian Sten-type weapons, other firearms, and large quantities of ammunition. Once the shipments reached the border, they were transported by Mohamed Belhaj himself or by trusted associates such as Essadek Zouari, El Hachemi Reddad, and others (8).

The Route Across Tunisian Territory

Regarding the route from El Oued through Tunisia, Ahmed Essadek Zouari recalled that he personally accompanied Mohamed Belhaj by truck from El Oued to the border town of Douz, then continued through Hamma Ben Zid, Jabal Ben Khédache, Medenine, Houaya, Ben Gardane, Tataouine, Douiret, and Ouled Debbab.

After purchasing weapons from these locations, they bought the number of camels required to carry the cargo across the desert, accompanied by experienced guides and assistants.

Meanwhile, Mohamed Belhaj returned to El Oued by truck ahead of the caravan so that he could prepare secure storage facilities before the convoy arrived. According to eyewitnesses, there were two principal weapons depots:

- The first was located in El Oued, at the home of Belkacem Addouka.
- The second was in Reguiba, at the residence of Bachir Jaballah.

Within Libyan territory, the caravan route generally followed this sequence:

Nalut → Jabal Ouled Mahmoud → Al-Hawamid → Al-Ruhaybat → Fassato → Zintan → Al-Rajban → Yefren → Tripoli.

Ahmed Essadek Zouari also reported that, in 1950, they undertook a rapid mission to Tunisia to transport a cache of approximately 1,000–1,100 Italian-made cartridges, which had been hidden since 1949 by Amar Lakoubi, a Tunisian resident of the town of Douz. (9)

Financial Support for Weapons Procurement

Initially, the purchase of weapons and ammunition was financed through financial contributions made by nationalist activists from Oued Souf, supplemented by personal donations.

For example, Mouldi Ounissi donated his entire salary for several consecutive years, while Bachir Mihi sold most of his palm groves to finance the purchase of arms.

Another important contributor was Amin Ounissi, who was employed by the colonial authorities to distribute dynamite (TNT) to farmers in Hassi Khalifa, where the rocky soil required explosives for digging palm plantations. He secretly falsified the official records by concealing half of the allocated explosives and delivering them to leaders of the Special Organization (OS), who subsequently forwarded them to the movement's central leadership. These explosives were later used to manufacture the first bombs employed during the Algerian Revolution, which were assembled at the farm of Mostefa Ben Boulaïd in Tazoult and in the village of El Hadjadj.

In 1953, Hafnaoui Nassib contributed 610,000 French francs, which he entrusted to Mohamed Belhaj to purchase weapons for the anticipated liberation struggle.

Likewise, before the outbreak of the Revolution, Mouldi Ounissi personally donated:

- One Italian-made machine gun with a 32-round magazine.
- Two ammunition boxes containing 500 cartridges.
- One American-made automatic pistol with a 9-round capacity, together with 100 cartridges.
- Eleven Italian-made Sten submachine guns.
- Two barrels of ammunition.
- An additional machine gun, pistol, ammunition, and rifle from his personal collection.

According to Abdelkader El Amoudi, weapons procurement was organized along two distinct lines:

1. Weapons intended for training and arming local activists, financed through their own contributions.
2. Strategic weapons reserves for the Liberation Revolution, financed by the national leadership of the organization.

Although substantial quantities of weapons were available through merchants in Oued Souf, most of the arms were obtained from Libya and Tunisia in order to preserve operational secrecy. El Amoudi emphasized that persuading local merchants to sell large quantities of weapons was extremely difficult.

To ensure the success of these operations, a meeting was held at Ghout El-Flawine, east of Robbah, during which responsibilities were assigned among the activists. Mohamed Belhaj was appointed to supervise both the collection of weapons inside Algeria and their procurement from abroad. Belkacem Assila was placed in charge of organizational affairs, Ali Ouadah became

responsible for collecting financial contributions, while Bachir Ben Moussa and Tayeb Gatria were assigned intelligence gathering and monitoring enemy movements.

Following this meeting, specialized groups were formed and immediately began carrying out the operations through successive shipments of weapons. (10)

The First and Second Arms Shipments

The First Shipment:

The first consignment of weapons was collected and purchased within the Souf region immediately after the establishment of the Special Organization (OS) in 1947. Its primary purpose was to train and arm activists in each locality. Over the following three years, a surplus amounting to several hundred weapons was accumulated through the financial contributions and donations of nationalist militants. Initially, these weapons were concealed at the homes of Bachir Jaballah in Reguiba, Chouchane Soltani in Amiche, and other locations in El Oued. They were subsequently transported to Biskra, Skikda (formerly Philippeville), Annaba, Sétif, and other regions. The principal supply route for these weapons passed through Biskra.

During the same period, additional quantities of weapons were collected and transported to support the western regions of southern Algeria through several operations, including:

- Ahmed Ben Ghrissi and Larbi Aïchouch transported 232 rifles together with large quantities of ammunition over four successive missions. These shipments were delivered to the mountainous regions of Ghardaïa, Metlili, and neighboring areas in southern Algeria, in coordination with nationalist activists from Ouargla.
- Ahmed Tijani and one of his companions brought 12 firearms with ammunition from southern Tunisia. These were hidden in the palm groves of the El Bayadha district. Saad Ben Mohamed Aïchouch later transported an equivalent quantity, while Bachir Zitouna delivered another significant but unspecified shipment of weapons and ammunition.

The Second Shipment:

The second shipment was brought from Tunisia by Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, who personally financed its purchase (11).

3. Mohamed Belhaj's Contribution to Transporting Weapons to the Aurès Mountains

Transporting weapons into the interior of Algeria was an extremely hazardous undertaking due to the numerous French military checkpoints and the extensive intelligence network established throughout the southern desert region, which was governed under a strict military administration. Nevertheless, despite these difficult circumstances, weapons were successfully transported using several methods, the most important of which was camel caravans.

A. Transporting Weapons by Camel Caravans

The camel caravans usually traveled toward Oued Souf carrying loads of barley from the Zrayeb area of the Ziban region. After the barley was sold in the El Oued market, the sacks were secretly

refilled with weapons and ammunition with the assistance of local nationalists, including Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, Abdelkader El Amoudi, and Bachir Ben Moussa. These smuggling operations continued until 1950.

The veteran revolutionary Abdelkader El Amoudi, who led the first weapons caravan, described the journey to Zeribet Hamad as follows:

"Before setting out, we spent three days scouting the route. Mohamed Belhaj and I searched for the safest path and the one least frequented by people so that we would not attract attention during the journey. On the day of departure, we remained hidden in a *ghout* (sunken palm grove) belonging to our companion Belkacem Addouka, located east of El Oued. We dug up the hidden weapons and packed them into grain sacks. Each of us carried his personal weapon with sufficient ammunition to protect the caravan along the route.

We agreed that the caravan would depart at night. After sunset, the two camel handlers sent by Mohamed Essami arrived with the camels at Addouka's *ghout* to load the sacks, unaware of their contents. The caravan consisted of seven camels. (12)

We departed after the evening prayer and deliberately avoided populated areas. Our plan was to continue without stopping until we had completely left inhabited regions behind. We followed the well-known eastern route passing through the villages of Behima and Sidi Aoun. We traveled throughout the night and continued until midday the following day. At that point, we stopped in an area where there were trees, alfa grass, and other vegetation suitable for grazing the camels.

Some of us slept while two men remained on guard. After resting for about three hours, we prepared a simple meal on site and resumed our journey. On the evening of the third day, we arrived at Zeribet Hamad, where the weapons were stored in one of the houses. We agreed to leave the village before dawn and travel by bus to Biskra to complete the remaining arrangements with Mohamed Essami."

The weapons remained hidden at Zeribet Hamad for approximately one month before being transferred to the Aurès Mountains by Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, Mohamed Medour, and another revolutionary. Since mules were more suitable than camels for the rugged mountain terrain, the weapons were transported by mule and ultimately stored in the Arris region under the supervision of Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, where they remained until the outbreak of the Algerian Revolution.

Mohamed Essami's Account of the Operation

Mohamed Essami provided further details regarding the operation:

"Mohamed Belouizdad instructed us to send this shipment of weapons to the Aurès. I therefore contacted Mohamed Essghir Hammoudi, a supporter of the nationalist movement who is now an imam in the agricultural village of Toumas, located between Zeribet El Oued and Zeribet Hamad, and belonging to the Ouled Bouhadidja tribe.

He came to Biskra, where I gave him enough money to purchase barley and hire camels so that he could travel to Oued Souf to collect the weapons. Beforehand, I had already coordinated with

Ahmed Miloudi, Abdelkader El Amoudi, Bachir Ben Moussa, and Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, instructing them to await his arrival in Oued Souf.

Everything proceeded according to plan. They sold the barley, filled the sacks with rifles and ammunition, loaded them onto the camels, and accompanied the caravan. The shipment consisted of 103 firearms.

In May 1948, they arrived at Toumas, where the weapons were hidden in underground grain silos and covered with earth. They remained concealed until Mostefa Ben Boulaïd arrived from the Aurès. I informed him that Mohamed Belouizdad had instructed me to deliver 50,000 French francs to him for the purchase of mules that would transport the weapons from Toumas to the Aurès Mountains. As a means of identification, I tore a twenty-franc banknote into two halves. One half was given to Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, while the other half was entrusted to the man with whom we had hidden the weapons at Toumas, namely Mohamed Essghir Belaïd Hammoudi. When the two halves matched, the weapons were released and delivered safely." (13)

B. Transporting Weapons by Buses and Trucks

When the French colonial authorities intensified their surveillance of camel caravans, the method of transporting weapons from Oued Souf to Biskra was changed between 1950 and 1954. The revolutionaries began using trucks and passenger buses, particularly for transporting small firearms such as pistols, ammunition, and explosives.

The weapons were concealed inside boxes of dates, tea crates, and sacks of white Deglet dates, while rifles were wrapped in blankets and covered with woven mats belonging to travelers seeking employment. After obtaining travel tickets through Laroussi Ennoubli, an employee of the passenger transport company who facilitated these operations, the weapons were received in Biskra, either in the nearby forest or at the passenger bus station.

Mohamed Essami confirmed this method, stating:

"We purchased 35 military firearms, together with their ammunition, from Oued Souf. Ten of them were wrapped inside reed mats, while the remaining twenty-five were placed in a wooden crate. Mohamed Essami and Ahmed Zegouni transported these weapons aboard the *Maamar* passenger bus from Oued Souf to Biskra, where they concealed them in Ahmed Zegouni's house. Some time later, we attempted to send them to Constantine, and Abdelhafid Belbekri undertook responsibility for transporting them."

Abdelkader El Amoudi also described other aspects of these repeated operations:

"We transported weapons at different intervals aboard passenger buses, concealing them inside sacks of white Deglet dates, boxes of dates, or among the bedding and reed mats carried by travelers. Some employees of the bus company, including Laroussi Ennoubli, cooperated with us. Likewise, our contacts in Biskra helped facilitate these operations." (14)

C. Transporting Weapons by Train

Weapons were also transported by railway. They were hidden inside export date crates, which were specially sealed. The nationalist activists placed distinctive identifying marks on these crates before shipping them to Ech-Chaqqa railway station.

Upon arrival, the crates were received by the revolutionary Abdelkrim Hachiya. At the station warehouse, Kaddour Lakhdar Aouini secretly removed the rifles from the crates and transported them by his own means to Biskra.

These railway operations were supervised by Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, with the assistance of Bachir Attallah, who managed the affairs of one of the largest date-exporting companies shipping dates to France.

Conclusion

The Oued Souf region played a highly significant and effective role in supporting the growth and activities of the Algerian nationalist movement, particularly the Algerian People's Party (PPA) and its struggle for national independence. A group of determined young militants, led by Ahmed Miloudi and his close companion Mohamed Belhaj Mihi, dedicated themselves to advancing the cause of Algerian independence.

Mohamed Belhaj attended the Belcourt Conference in Algiers and became an active member of the Special Organization (OS). He was especially distinguished for his repeated missions to Tunisia and Libya, during which he successfully organized and transported large consignments of weapons and ammunition between 1947 and 1954, laying the logistical foundations for the outbreak of the Algerian War of Independence.

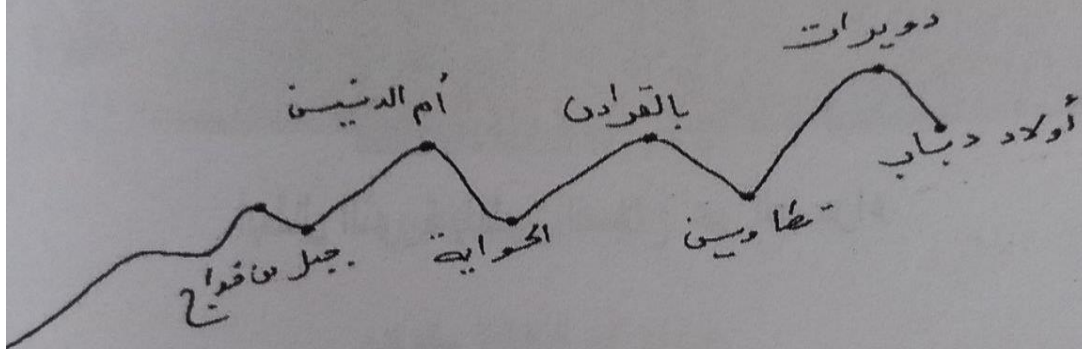
Among the nationalist leaders who visited Oued Souf were Mohamed Belouizdad, Larbi Ben M'hidi, and Mostefa Ben Boulaïd, all of whom reached an agreement with Mohamed Belhaj and his associates to supply the revolution with arms.

Mohamed Belhaj carried out this mission with remarkable determination, crossing the harsh deserts of Nalut, Ghadames, Beni Khédache, and Tataouine. He successfully acquired large shipments of weapons, military equipment, and ammunition, which he transported to El Oued, where they were carefully concealed. Together with his comrades Ahmed Miloudi and Abdelkader El Amoudi, he subsequently organized their transfer through Zeribet Hamad, Zeribet El Oued, and Biskra to the Aurès Mountains.

These operations provided a substantial portion of the logistical resources that enabled the successful outbreak of the Algerian Revolution on 1 November 1954.

Appendix 1: Map of the Route Followed within Tunisian Territory for the Procurement of Weapons

خريطة التنقل داخل التراب التونسي
لشراء السلاح للثورة التحرير الجزائرية

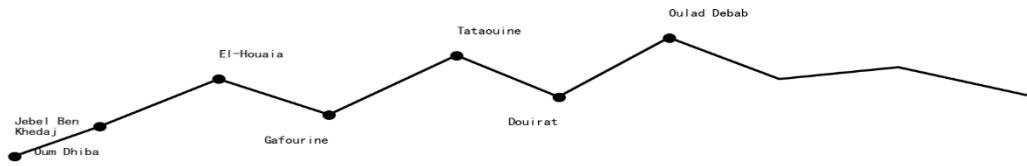


كالتالي: / 1- قرية دوز، 2- حامة بن زيد، 3- جبل بن خداج.

4- مدنين، 5- الحواية، 6- بن قردان.

7- تطاوين، 8- دويرات، 9- أولاد دباب.

**Transit Map Inside Tunisian Territory
for Purchasing Weapons for the Algerian Liberation Revolution**

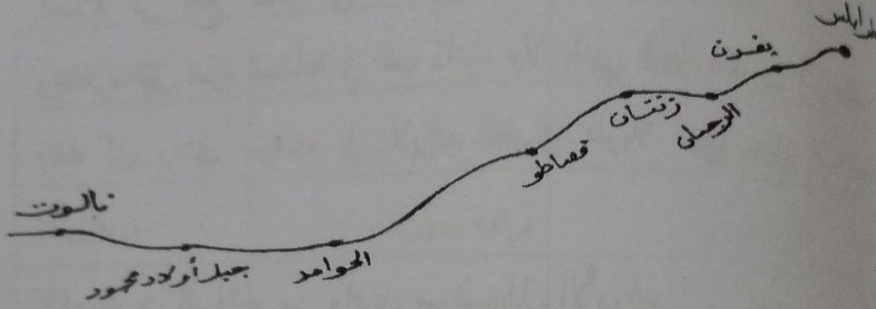


The transit stations for the convoy inside Tunisian territory are as follows:
Douz Village, Hama Ben Zid, Jebel Ben Khedaj, Medenine, El-Houaia, Ben Guerdane, Tataouine, Douirat, Oulad Debab.

As follows:
1- Douz Village, 2- Hama Ben Zid, 3- Jebel Ben Khedaj,
4- Medenine, 5- El-Houaia, 6- Ben Guerdane,
7- Tataouine, 8- Douirat, 9- Oulad Debab.

Appendix 2: Map of the Route Followed within Libyan Territory for the Procurement of Weapons

خريطة التنقل داخل التراب الليبي
لشراء السلاح لثورة التحرير الجزائرية



وكان التنقل للقافلة داخل التراب الليبي على النحو التالي: نالوت، جبل أولاد محمود، الحوامد، أرحيات، فصاطو، زنتان، الرجبان، يفرن، طرابلس.

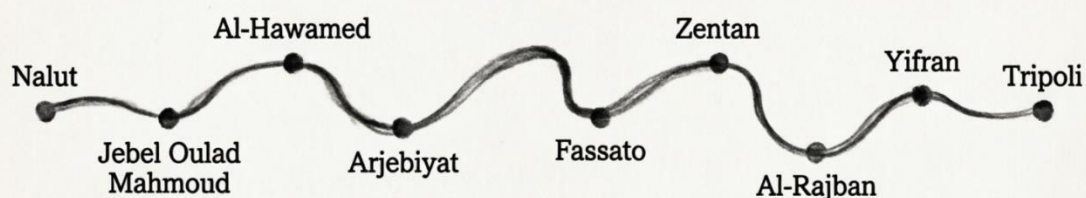
- كالتالي: /

1- نالوت، 2- جبل أولاد محمود، 3- الحوامد.

4- أرحيات، 5- فصاطو، 6- زنتان، 7- الرجبان.

8- يفرن، 9- طرابلس.

Transit Map Inside Libyy Territory for Purchasing Weapons for the Algerian Liberation Revolution



The transit stations for the convoy inside Libyy territory are as follows: Nalut, Jebel Oulad Mahmoud, Al-Hawamed, Arjebiyat, Fassato, Zentan, Al-Rajban, Yifran, Tripoli.

As follows./1- Nalut, 2- Jebel Oulad Mahmoud, 3- Al-Hawamed./4- Arjebiyat, 5- Fassato, 6- Zentan, 7- Al-Rajban./8- Yifran, 9- Tripoli.

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